

6 February 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Brigadier General Robert E. Pursley, USAF
Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT : Vietnam Questions

Per your request, here is a list of questions the Secretary might find it profitable to ask. In keeping with the spirit of our earlier conversations on this score, they cover the waterfront and transcend jurisdictional boundaries. The questions are roughly grouped by topic but are not specifically keyed to the format of Captain Murphy's 5 February list.

I. Evidence

The Secretary is liable to get some sharp questioning from Congress upon his return with respect to the evidentiary base on which current official assessments of the Vietnam situation are grounded. During our 4 February session before his old committee (House Appropriations), for example, several members -- notably Mr. Jamie Whitten -- zeroed in on the enemy body count figures, which he clearly regarded with jaundiced skepticism. It might therefore be prudent for the Secretary to be able to say that he personally had looked into relevant questions such as the following:

1. How are enemy body count statistics compiled?
2. What checks, particularly independent checks, are made on the counts of individual unit commanders in individual actions?
3. How accurate are the body count statistics overall?

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4. Is there any way the reliability and credibility of this data series can be improved?

5. Similar questions should be posed with respect to our data on other disputed topics such as

a. Local security.

b. ARVN field performance.

c. Chieu Hoi ralliers (e.g., how many are draft dodgers as opposed to genuine VC?).

II. ARVN

1. How frank and honest are the appraisals Vietnamese officers give of ARVN's capabilities for assuming responsibilities of US combat units as the latter are withdrawn?

2. Are there any indications that pessimistic appraisals might reflect a deliberate "line" adopted to slow down the pace of US withdrawals?

3. ARVN leadership has been repeatedly stressed (over the years) as a major stumbling block to ARVN performance. What specifically is being done, and what has actually been done in fields such as the following:

a. Training and upgrading the performance of NCO's, platoon leaders and company grade officers.

b. Battlefield promotions.

c. Reassessing socially restrictive educational requirements for commissioned rank to permit natural leaders with proven combat records to aspire to, and assume, platoon and company commands.

4. In areas where ARVN units have taken over responsibility from US units (e.g., the 7th Division) are they pressing aggressively or hunkering down?

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III. GVN

1. To what extent does Thieu's confidence in his own strength involve the risk of his being too cavalier with articulate people (e.g., civilian politicians) or groups (e.g., the An Quang Buddhists) and thus creating political problems (e.g., the Chau affair) that tact or forbearance could avoid?
2. How valid is the charge that Thieu is sharply (and dangerously) constricting the circle of those whose opinions he listens to and from whom he seeks advice?
3. Should the Communists drastically shift their tactics in the political arena -- open up at Paris, say, or call for a cease fire -- how ready is the GVN to move flexibly in a new situation? What is the risk in such a situation of a Washington-Saigon rift along the lines of November-December 1968?
4. We know the Communists are emphasizing their military and civilian proselytizing efforts, legalizing some of their cadres (via the Chieu Hoi route, among others) and generally readying themselves against the contingency of open political struggle. How alert is the GVN to this pattern of activity? What is it doing to counter this type of subversive thrust?

IV. Economic Matters

1. Where does the land reform program really stand? When is the Assembly likely to act? What is the GVN's real position on this topic and what are the real political effects of its legislative program, even if passed, likely to be?
2. How is the anti-inflation program, including last fall's austerity taxes, really working?
3. How widely are the GVN's anti-inflation measures understood, how much resentment are they causing, what is their political (as opposed to economic) impact?

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4. How has inflation and the GVN's counter measures affected the political views of fixed income groups, particularly the class of civil servants and members of the military establishment on whom Thieu is relying for political support?

5. To what extent, if any, is the economic issue crystallizing and providing an emotionally charged focus for diffuse discontent with Thieu and the GVN? (I.e., is this issue even beginning to show signs of working the way the "Buddhist" issue did in 1963?)

V. The Enemy

1. What do US and GVN officials really think the Communists intend to do with their new force structure in the delta?

2. How do officials on the ground rate the chances of the Communists' sharply expanding their military effort later in the spring, then following up with a political offensive (e.g., a call for serious negotiations possibly including an immediate cease fire)?

VI. Other Matters

1. How is the program of weapons improvements for Laotian forces (M-16s, T-28s, etc.) really going?

2. What moves are being considered by the GVN, or the US Mission, to encourage or take advantage of the Cambodian Government's increasing disenchantment with Communist incursions?

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1 - DOD Special Projects w/atts

1 - VAS/RAC w/atts

1 - GAC Chrono w/o atts ✓

✗ 1 - VAS Chrono w/o atts

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